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Psychology Test Shocks Sen. Ervin

By Phil Casey
Staff Reporter

Sen. Sam Ervin (D-N.C.), head of a Senate Subcommittee on the Constitutional Rights of Federal Employes, yesterday released a sample list of questions asked some employes in psychological tests, which the Senator feels might impinge on individuals' rights for privacy.

Some dashing questions one woman was asked to answer true or false, "without any thinking":

"Christ performed miracles." "Once in a while I think of things too bad to talk about." "Many of my dreams are about sex matters."

She had to indicate whether she was troubled, and to what extent, by matters including: "Deciding whether I'm really in love." "Being too inhibited in sex matters." "Confused in my religious beliefs." "Differing from my family in religious beliefs."

She was given 225 questions consisting of pairs of statements and directed to choose the statement she preferred, or disliked the least. Among these, said Sen. Ervin, were these pairs:

"A. I feel depressed by my own inability to handle various subjects. B. I like to read books and plays in which sex plays a major part."

"A. I like to listen to or tell jokes in which sex plays a major part. B. I feel like getting revenge when someone has insulted me."

Senator Ervin termed some of these questions "shocking" and said his Subcommittee will make a complete report on its investigation at the next session of Congress.

He said that replies from 38 Federal agencies indicate "inconsistency in agency policies" regarding interviewing of Government employes.

Ervin wants to find out whether employes or applicants are permitted to have counsel, or a friend or relative present at interviews for Government employment and for clearance for sensitive posts.

Twenty-five agencies said they did not discourage or deny the presence of a third person. Three do not permit it. Several neither discourage or encourage it. A few, Ervin said, will permit counsel but forbid the presence of a friend or relative.

Ervin said he asked the State Department what situations would "justify such an invasion of privacy" as he found in the Department's psychological tests. He was told that the tests were given to foreign service employes showing signs of an emotional breakdown under the stress of work, to employes in sensitive security posts, and to employes who have emotional problems that require treatment.

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